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AUTHOR Erlandson, David A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a longitudinal study of principals' professional needs. The study began with pilot studies in 1994 under the approval of the University Consortium of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and involved universities in five states. Members of the pilot groups were asked to provide open-ended responses to questions concerning professional needs. These responses were then grouped and sent to an expanded sample of principals to see if they concurred. Responses from this second round were used to develop the study's taxonomy and to determine wording for items in the final form of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were mailed in 1996 and 1997. The 1998 survey was conducted totally by electronic means. The return rates had fallen with each year, and the universities decided to end the study. However, surveys were to be sent to principals in Texas who were interested in continuing with the survey. Survey results indicate that principals' greatest professional needs are in the area of instruction. They also placed high priority on parent relationships and personal relationships in the school. Furthermore, the principals' responses within particular professional need categories, such as technology, represented different levels of growth and adaptation. Summary reports of the 1996 and 1997 surveys are included. (RJM)

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The Longitudinal Study of the Professional Needs of Principals

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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A Brief History of the Longitudinal Study

The idea for a longitudinal study of the professional needs of principals came as a result of a study done by David A. Erlandson for the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (*Building a Career: Fulfilling the Lifetime Professional Needs of Principals*) in 1994.

Dr. Erlandson began in Summer 1994 to conduct a number of pilot studies with successive groups of principals to try to develop a taxonomy of professional needs as they saw them. These pilot studies had three results:

1. The development of a taxonomy of principals' professional needs.
2. The incorporation into the study of a measure of the professional growth and adaptation modes identified by principals in expressing their needs.
3. The development of a reliable instrument that also had content validity in terms of the expressed professional needs of principals.

The various pilot groups were simply asked to provide open-ended responses to a request that they identify their professional needs. These were grouped and sent to an expanded sample of principals to see if they concurred. Responses from this second round were used to develop a taxonomy of professional needs and to determine wording for items in the final form of the questionnaire. After administering two iterations of this final closed questionnaire format to pilot groups, a final questionnaire was developed that was used in the 1996 and 1997 studies .

In the second round of the study it was discovered that responses within particular professional need categories (e.g., "technology" or "instruction") were representing different levels of growth and adaptation on the part of the responding principals. These different responses seemed generally to correspond to the growth and adaptation modes identified by Boyatzis and Kolb (1992). This work of Boyatzis and Kolb (Modes of Growth and Adaptation throughout Career and Life) also seemed to make clear that these modes were important because they suggested very different strategies of professional development to address them. Consequently, as the final questionnaire was being developed, two items were included for each professional need category contained in the questionnaire. A Level 1 item represented Boyatzis and Kolb's Performance Mode. A Level 2 item represented either a Learning Mode or a Development Mode.

Content validity was established by comparing the numerous open-ended responses obtained during the pilot studies with taxonomies provided by professional associations and textbooks on the principalship. Reliability was established by comparing the responses to the same items by the pilot groups in the two phases of questionnaire refinement.

At that time the Principals' Center made plans to initiate an annual survey of the professional needs of principals, using a longitudinal data base that would include 60 principals from elementary, middle, and high schools. Plans were also made to augment returns from this annual survey with in-depth qualitative studies that would help interprete the results that were obtained

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from the survey.

In October 1995 the Longitudinal Study was presented to the University Consortium of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. At that time the University Consortium included universities from five states: California, Illinois, Missouri, Texas, and South Carolina. The consortium members endorsed the Longitudinal Study and collaboratively developed a way in which all five states would participate in a joint study to be coordinated by the Texas A&M University Principals' Center. A random sample of 200 principals from elementary, middle, and high schools was selected from each state. This five-state study was initiated in March 1996. However, shortly after the 1996 survey was sent out, NASSP, as part of a major internal reorganization, disbanded the University Consortium. Nevertheless, the five universities decided to maintain their collaborative efforts on the Longitudinal Study.

The Longitudinal Study was administered by mailed questionnaire in both 1996 and 1997. In 1996 an overall response rate of approximately 75% was obtained in four states (Illinois, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas). Because of logistical difficulties, survey forms in California were not sent out until very late in the Spring semester. Consequently, only 20 usable forms were received, a response rate of 10%. Because of the loss of logistical support from NASSP and the high costs of mailing, tabulating, and analyzing a pencil-and-paper questionnaire, the decision was made prior to mailing out the 1997 survey, to notify principals that in coming years the survey would be conducted by electronic means (e-mail or web survey). Probably because of this the 1997 return rate was relatively low, approximately 30% for the four states. Once again logistical problems prevented California from receiving more than a minimal return.

Returns by state, level of school, and size of school for the 1996 and 1997 surveys may be viewed on the Longitudinal Study web site (http://www.tamu.edu/~princtr/longstudy/long.html).

In 1998 the longitudinal survey was conducted totally electronically. The questionnaire used in this survey had been augmented by open-ended responses supplied by principals in the 1996 and 1997 surveys. However, return rates were very poor (about 10% for Texas and lower in the other states). These poor results effectively ended the Consortium's efforts to maintain a multi-state longitudinal study, and Consortium members made the decision to discontinue their collective efforts. At a Principals' Center planning retreat in January 1999, the decision was made to continue to work with those principals who had indicated a desire to stay with the longitudinal study. Because only one state would now be involved in the study and the number of principals was smaller, Principals' Center staff could give more attention to communicating and working with respondents. Results from the 1998 Texas study are now also available on the Longitudinal Study web site.

Beginning in 2000, emphasis will be placed on servicing a smaller number of Texas principals who have indicated their dedication to maintaining the longitudinal data base. Over time, this data base (now containing approximately 30 principals) will be expanded to approximately 60 principals, the size originally envisioned. At the same time communications to this smaller group will be extended, and the first qualitative studies will be initiated. At the present time the Longitudinal Study is being coordinated by Melissa Liu, a graduate student in the Principals' Center. She may be contacted at the Principals' Center at 979-845-2766 or directly at 979-862-1336.

Patterns in Principals' Professional Needs

The overall patterns of principals' professional needs have been relatively constant over the three years since initiation of the Longitudinal Study. Though there have been some minor differences, the same patterns of responses have prevailed across grade levels, school size, or level of school (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school).

For example, these patterns prevailed across the various surveys:

1. The greatest professional needs of principals lie in the dimension of Instruction.
2. By contrast their expressed needs in the Curriculum dimension are relatively low.
3. Principals place high priority on developing Parent Relationships.
4. They also place high priority on the personal relationships that exist within the school. These priorities are fairly evenly split between needs associated with Boyatzis and Kolb's Performance Mode and those associated with the Learning and Development Modes.
5. Principals as a whole give relatively little priority to their own learning.
6. Meeting legal requirements is given high priority by principals.
7. Building and maintaining organizational control in their schools is given high priority by principals.

As noted above, based upon the open-ended responses by principals in the 1996 and 1997 surveys, the 1998 survey was augmented to include three new dimensions, one in each of the survey's categories:

1. Character Education was added as a dimension to the Educational Program category.
2. Team Relationships was added as a dimension to the Personal Relations category.
3. Discipline was added as a dimension to the Program Support category.

In the 1998 survey Character Education was considered a priority need by only about 15% of the principals in the sample. However, more than half the principals considered Team Relationships and Discipline as priority needs.

Where Do We Go from Here?

The decision has been made for the time being to focus our attention on principals in the state of Texas. However, the five state study did have some clear benefits for our purposes. Perhaps the most significant finding was that with a few relatively minor exceptions, principals apparently have the same professional needs in every part of the nation. This is useful as we focus our attention on Texas principals. It's always an interesting question: How do our principals compare with other principals. Perhaps after we've spent a few more years in focusing on Texas, we can run parallel studies in another state. With a minimum of external funding (less than $20,000 per year) the study could be expanded to a multi-state study.

In the meanwhile, we'll focus on our Texas study. One of the first things we need to do is to look at what changes in professional needs have been expressed by individual principals over the last three years. Another thing we need to do is to select small groups of principals from our Texas data base for follow-up qualitative studies. The first of these studies was completed by Roxanne Carmichael-Rosales during the 1997-1998 school year and reported in her December 1999 dissertation at Texas A&M University. Her study surveyed 109 principals in Bexar County. She

followed these survey returns with in-depth interviews of 13 of those principals. Other studies of small groups will follow.

If you're a principal and are not presently in our data-base, we'd like you to consider joining us. At present we have approximately 30 principals in our data base and would like to gradually increase that number to 60, which was the original number we envisioned when we started the Longitudinal Study. The preferred way of becoming part of the Longitudinal Study is simply to go to our web-site and click on "Survey Form" and fill out the 2000 survey on the web and click "Submit the Form." Or you can contact Melissa on e-mail (yliu@tamu.edu) and she'll get back to you so that you can submit it that way. Or simply call her at 979-862-1336 or 979-845-2766.

Whether you are currently in our data-base or are considering joining it, please give David Erlandson a call (979-845-2792) if you'd like to talk more about it. Over time we will be able to derive some understandings from this study that will make a very positive contribution to the professional development of principals in Texas and across the nation.

For any comment or question, please feel free to email us

Director of Principals' Center: Dr. David A. Erlandson (davider@acs.tamu.edu)
Graduate Assistant: Melissa Ying Liu (yliu@tamu.edu)

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Summary of the 1997 Survey

The decision to shift our survey study from a traditional mail survey to an electronic base had a dampening effect on the established sample. The final return rate of the 1997 survey from four states (Illinois, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas) was only about 30% in contrast to the 1996 survey return rate of approximately 75%. In comparing the returns for the two years, we found that there were no major differences in the percentages among the categories for the two years. The overall results of the 1997 surveys for the four states were tabulated according to school levels, and years at current position. (Click the word "tabulated" to see the two tables.)

During the process of comparing the returns for the two years, we noticed that some items of the instrument were rarely selected. Examination of these rarely chosen items revealed that the options provided by these items in the instrument were weak ones, with which most principals could not identify. Accordingly, we used the open-ended responses that were presented by survey respondents to replace some of these weak items. We also used a composite of open-ended responses to add several items to the survey instrument. The revised survey format can be seen in the Web Site under the address of Principals' Center:

(Http://www.coe.tamu.edu/~yuan).

Please take a few more minutes to fill in the 1998 survey form, answer the revised questions, and send it back to us.

Thank you!

Summary Report on the First Year (1996) of the Longitudinal Study of the Career Needs of Principals

After an excellent return from 577 principals in five states (California, Illinois, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas), responses to the first year (1996) of the Longitudinal Study of the Career Needs of Principals were tabulated and analyzed. A summary of the total returns from the five states are contained in **three tables** that accompany this report:

- Table 1 shows the overall responses of the principals in the five states categorized according to level of school (elementary school, middle school, high school).

  Table 2 shows the overall responses of the principals in the five states categorized by amount of experience in their present positions.

  Table 3 shows the overall responses of the principals in the five states categorized by total experience as a principal.

Responses were tabulated in three sets according to type of need:

- SET A includes principal needs related to the educational program of the school.

  SET B includes principal needs related to personal relations.

  SET C includes principal needs related to elements of program support.

Responses were also tabulated by mode of professional growth and adaptation, as identified by Boyatzis and Kolb (Modes of rowth and adaptation throuhout career and life):

- Response category 1 identifies needs related to the Performance Mode. The performance mode reflects concern with mastering the behavioral skills that are related to job and organizational demands.

  Response category 2 identifies needs related to the Learning Mode or the Development Mode. These modes reflect the desire to apply and extend current skills to new settings or to make contributions to wider social contexts.

The findings from Tables 1 - 3 (and similar tables from the separate states) are summarized as follows:

Table 1 (responses categorized according to level of school)

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- 1. Major response patterns generally held true across all five states. For example, principals at all three levels in all states, with only two minor exceptions, identified their greatest professional needs in terms of Instruction. The second most commonly identified need, also fairly uniform across states and school levels, had to do with extending the school's influence throughout the school and into the homes by developing the school as a learning community (External Support, response 2).

  2. There were also minor variations in state responses among the three school levels. For example, in regard to extending the school's influence as a learning community (External Support, response 2), high school principals in three of the five states (TX, SC, and IL) were more likely to identify it as a top priority than were their colleagues in the elementary or middle schools. However, in one state (MO) both elementary and middle school principals identified this priority more frequently than did high school principals. 3. In none of the states, nor for any of the response categories, did school level seem to make much difference in whether or not a principal selected Response 1 (performance mode) or Response 2 (learning mode or development mode).

Table 2 (responses categorized according to experience in current position)

- 1. As in the case of Table 1, major response patterns held true across all states.

  2. For professional needs related to Education Program (SET A) and Program Support (SET C), level of experience in current position made no difference in the identified mode of professional growth and adaptation (response 1 or response 2). However, for professional needs related to Personal Relations (SET B), level of experience was a clear factor, with principals having less than 2 years in their present positions indicating a much stronger inclination to phrase their professional needs in performance mode (response 1) terms. This was particularly true in relation to those responses associated with the principal's own role on the campus (Campus Role Relation) and with teacher relationships. These findings are consistent with what would be predicted from the Boyatzis and Kolb model.

Table 3 (responses categorized according to total experience as a principal)

- 1. As in the case of Tables 1 and 2, major response patterns held true across all states.

  2. Responses similar to those exhibited in Table 2 were given in relation to identified modes of professional growth and adaptation. However, patterns of response based on total principal experience in relation to Personal Relations (SET B) were somewhat less pronounced than patterns of response based on experience in present position. This would suggest that total principalship experience is less powerful in determining a principal's personal and interpersonal professional needs than is the particular context in which the principal operates. This preliminary finding regarding the relative impact of present and total experience suggests that this pattern may be profitably explored further through in-

depth qualitative studies.

The open-ended responses to the questionnaire were also examined and are still being analyzed. The primary use of these open-ended responses will be to identify smaller groups of principals in each of the five states for in-depth qualitative studies. They will also be used to help determine the need for changes in the questionnaire.

These first year responses can only give a quick snapshot on the career needs of principals. This snapshot by itself, while interesting, tells us little about how the needs of individual principals change over their careers. The survey's value in this respect will grow with each year's returns and analysis. In the meanwhile, qualitative studies of small groups of principals in each of the states will be conducted to amplify the meaning of the summary findings of this first year.

Results from these small group studies, tables for the separate states, and other information regarding the longitudinal study can be obtained by visiting the web site of the Texas A&M University **Principal's Center** that is connected with this report:

- Click Here to Fill in the Survey Form98